

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

tone: the expression of the attitude a writer takes toward a subject

HERE'S HOW

Step 1: Identify direct statements about a subject. As you read a passage, look for straightforward comments, such as those that say what something or someone is, feels, seems, or does. Ask yourself: What attitude on the part of the writer do these statements reveal?

EXAMPLE The statement “Modern art is an ugly fraud,” reveals a tone of disdain, disgust, or even outrage toward the subject of modern art.

Step 2: Identify key words and phrases that affect you strongly.

- Look for the strongest, most powerful words and phrases.
- Look for figurative language, sensory details, and imagery.
- Examine sound devices such as rhyme scheme, rhythm, meter, and refrain.

For each element that leaves an impact, ask yourself: How does it make me feel? What feelings does the language express? Those feelings point to the **tone** of the passage.

Step 3: Read the passage aloud. As you listen to the words read aloud, imagine that the author is speaking to you. You can often hear the writer’s tone come through when the words are spoken. Listen especially for irony, when the author says the opposite of what he or she means.

Step 4: Use precise adjectives to describe the tone of the passage. Collect your thoughts and feelings and try to focus them into one or two words. What tone of voice came through in your oral reading? What feeling in the words, imagery, and sounds has the biggest impact on you? What attitude is clear from any direct statements? The answers can be worded as a description of tone. The list shows adjectives commonly used to describe tone.

serious	admiring	anxious	objective	ironic
humorous	playful	shocked	nostalgic	mocking
sad	bitter	pleading	scornful	lighthearted
angry	proud	detached	sarcastic	happy
tongue-in-cheek				

Step 5: Analyze the impact of tone on meaning. First think about the author’s intent and overall theme, or message. Then ask yourself:

- How does tone, or attitude, help to convey an overall message?
- What does the writer achieve by using one tone rather than another?